




Ivelin Ivanov (Veliko Tŕrnovo)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6283-7058>

## BULGARIANS, CUMANS, TEUTONS, AND VLACHS IN THE FIRST DECADES OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

**Abstract.** The article refers to some aspects of the history of today's Bulgarian and Romanian territories, going back to the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. First, the author emphasizes the impact of the Teutonic Order in Burzenland on Bulgarian-Cuman relations in the period under question. The article provides a different alternative viewpoint on the events of the second decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Contrary to researchers who focus on the South and the Bulgarian-Latin conflict, the author seeks a solution to the problem by analyzing events in the North, reaching the lands of Burzenland region in Eastern Transylvania. He analyses the Teutonic-Cuman conflict of 1211–1222 and the success of the Teutons in Cumania after 1215. The author concludes that the dramatic change in the Bulgarian-Cuman relations could be explained by a new source of military and political influence that emerged in the second decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century – the Teutonic Order. Next, the paper is aimed at the highly discussed and controversial issue of Bulgarian-Vlach relations during the rule of the Assenid dynasty. Based on the written sources, the author explains the mass presence of Vlachs in the actions of the first Assenids with specific social, economic and political factors in the last two decades of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Second Bulgarian Tsardom, Cumans, Vlachs, Teutonic Order, Burzenland

The topic about the role of the Teutonic Order in the region of Burzenland, and the impact of the subsequent Teutonic conquest of Cuman territories East of the Carpathian mountains at the time of Tsar Boril (1207–1218) is understudied in Bulgarian historiography<sup>1</sup>. Most of the Bulgarian medievalists pay attention

<sup>1</sup> The Cumans and their influence on Bulgarian-Hungarian and Bulgarian-Latin relations are the object of research by a number of medievalists such as: В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на българската държава през сръднитъ вѣкове*, vol. III, *Второ българско царство. България при Асѣневци (1187–1280)*, София 1972; Хр. ДИМИТРОВ, *Българо-унгарски отношения през Средновековието*, София 1998; V. СТОУАНОВ, *Cumans in Bulgarian History (Eleventh–Fourteenth Centuries)*, [in:] *The Turks*, vol. I, *Early Ages*, part 9, *Turks in East Europe*, Ankara 2002, p. 680–689; А. НИКОЛОВ, *Cumani Bellatores in the Second Bulgarian State (1185–1396)*, [in:] *Annual of the Medieval Studies Department*, vol. XI, Budapest 2005, p. 223–229; Н. ИЛИЕВ, *Относно времето на потушаването на бунта срещу цар Борил във Видин*, [in:] *Известия на музеите в Северозападна България*, vol. IX, София 1984, p. 85–94; А. ДАНЧЕВА-ВАСИЛЕВА, *България и Латинската империя (1204–1261)*,

(to a greater or lesser extent) to the role of the Cumans in the political and the military plans and actions of the first rulers of the Assenid dynasty, but the role of the short-lasting, but powerful impact of the Teutonic Order in Southeastern Transylvania (between 1211–1225) on the Cumans is not in the focus of any Bulgarian medieval research. On the contrary, the settlement of the Order in Burzenland, the relations between the Teutonic knights and the Hungarian crown, as well as the Teutonic pressure on neighboring Cuman territories beyond the Carpathians, are subject of deep and comprehensive research<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, both in Bulgarian and in foreign language historiography cannot be found any studies of the impact of the Teutonic-Cuman wars from the period 1211–1225 on the situation south of river Danube.

The main-body of sources on these issues consists of the chronicles of Geoffroy de Villardouin<sup>3</sup>, Nicetas Choniates<sup>4</sup>, Robert de Clari<sup>5</sup>, Henri de Valenciennes<sup>6</sup>, the correspondence between Pope Innocent III and King Kaloyan<sup>7</sup>, some letters of the Latin Emperor Henry from the period 1206–1207<sup>8</sup>, the history of Georgius Acropolitae<sup>9</sup>, the chronicle of Theodori Scutariotae<sup>10</sup>, and others. A special place among the sources is occupied by several Hungarian royal charters and papal letters from the pontiffs of Gregory IX and Honorius III, testifying to the actions of the Teutons against the Cumans in the period 1211–1225<sup>11</sup>. Of great importance

---

София 1985; Р. Пл. Павлов, *Средновековна България и Куманите. Военнополитически отношения (1186–1241)*, ТВТУ 27, 1989, р. 9–59; И. Иванов, *Свои и чужди: образът на унгарци, хуни, българи, гърци, кумани, татари, сърби и власи в „Chronica Picta” от XIV в.*, [in:] SB, vol. XXXII, София 2017, р. 153–164; И.О. Князький, *Половцы в Днестровско-Карпатских землях и Нижнем Подунавье в конце XII-первых десятилетиях XIII в. Социально-экономическая и политическая история Молдавии периода феодализма*, Кишинев 1988, р. 22–32; Д. РАСОВСКИЙ, *Роль половцев в войнах Асенеи в Византийской и Латинской империями (1186–1207 гг.)*, СБАН 58, 1939, р. 203–211; Г. ЦАНКОВА-ПЕТКОВА, *България при Асеневици*, София 1978; F. DALL'AGLIO, *The Military Alliance between the Cumans and Bulgaria from the Establishment of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom to the Mongol Invasion*, АЕМА 16, 2008–2009, р. 29–54.

<sup>2</sup> The scope of foreign language research on the Teutonic presence in Transylvania in the 13<sup>th</sup> century is impressive, but the focus is mostly on Hungarian-Teutonic relations, with Cumans present mainly through Cuman-Hungarian and Cuman-Russian relations.

<sup>3</sup> ЖОФРОА ДЪО ВИЛАРДУЕН, *Завладяването на Константинопол*, София 1985 (cetera: VILARDUEN).

<sup>4</sup> *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, София 1983 [= FGHB, 11] (cetera: NICETAS CHONIATES), р. 8–94.

<sup>5</sup> ROBERT DE CLARI, *La conquête de Constantinople*, Paris 1974.

<sup>6</sup> АНРИ ДЪО ВАЛАНСИЕН, *История на император Анри*, София 2009 (cetera: VALANSIEN).

<sup>7</sup> *Innocentius III papa – Caloiohannes rex. Латински извори за българската история*, vol. III, София 1965, р. 307–379.

<sup>8</sup> *Litterae Henrici Constantinopolitani imperatoris ad dominum papam de debellatione Voullae apud Philipopolim*, [in:] PL, vol. CCXV, Paris 1855, col. 1522–1523.

<sup>9</sup> *Georgii Acropolitae Historia*, София 1972 [= FGHB, 8], р. 151–213.

<sup>10</sup> *Theodori Scutariotae Compendium chronicum*, София 1972 [= FGHB, 8], р. 214–304.

<sup>11</sup> Н. ZIMMERMANN, *Der Deutsche Orden im Burzenland. Eine diplomatische Untersuchung*, Köln 2000, р. 168–169; Р. ХАУТАЛА, *Панские послания в Венгрию, касающиеся пребывания теутонских рыцарей в Трансильвании (1211–1225)*, SSBP 1, 2015, р. 96–114.

are also some archaeological evidences from the areas between the Dniester, Carpathian, and Danube rivers in recent decades, which contribute to building a general picture of the nomadic presence in the period 10<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>.

Most of the researchers believe that the broken Bulgarian-Cuman relations under Boril were a consequence of the Cumans' intervention in the struggles between the Russian principalities and the Mongol invasion. However, both in Bulgarian and in foreign historiography, there is a lack of independent studies of the impact of the Teuton-Cuman wars of the period 1211–1225 on the political and military situation in Bulgaria. Analyzing the disintegration of the Bulgarian-Cuman alliance in the last years of Boril's rule, most of the researchers pay attention to the impact of the struggles between the Russian principalities, as well as the Mongol invasion as main reasons for the political turnaround after 1213–1214. According to some researchers, the chronological sequence of events was as follows.

Having secured the support of the Cumans through marriage to Kaloyan's widow – Cuman by birth, Tsar Boril continued the war against the Latin Empire in Constantinople, but suffered a defeat at Philippopolis on August 1, 1208. The following years were marked by further losses against the Latins. As a result, Tsar Boril forced into peaceful relationships with the Latin Empire. This political change threatened the traditional Bulgarian-Cuman alliance as Cumans no longer relied on raiding the rich Greek and Latin territories in Thrace. That was the reason why some Cuman chieftains entered into conflict with Boril and occupied the fortress of Vidin along with the surrounding territories between 1211 and 1213. The marriage of the Bulgarian tsar to the niece of Emperor Henry in 1213 probably further disrupted the Bulgarian-Cuman relations<sup>13</sup>.

The above sounds very logical from one point of perspective, but a clear contradiction can be seen (when considered) from another. On the one hand, it was precisely the conflict between Boril and the Cumans that played an important role in the loss of popularity and strong political basis, facilitating the coming candidate for the throne – Joan Assen, and his enthronement in 1218. At the same time, the new Bulgarian tsar did not change Boril's policy. Conscious of this contradiction, some authors suggest that the limited participation of the Cumans was due to

<sup>12</sup> A. IONITA, *Structures de pouvoir et populations au Nord du Danube aux X<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles reflétées par les découvertes funéraires*, TrRev 19.5, 2010, p. 115–134.

<sup>13</sup> F. DALL'AGLIO, *The Interaction between Nomadic and Sedentary Peoples on the Lower Danube: the Cumans and the "Second Bulgarian Empire"*, [in:] *The Steppe Lands and the World beyond them. Studies in Honor of Victor Spinei on his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, Iași 2013, p. 311–312. Dall'Aglio accepts that the conflict between Boril and the Cumans played a key role in the loss of popularity, facilitated the arrival of the claimant John Assen and his accession to the Bulgarian throne in 1218. At the same time, the reign of the new Bulgarian ruler did not change the political alliances. John II Assen (1218–1241) confirmed peaceful relations with the Latin Empire, and the number of Cumans in his troops was limited. In summary, Dall'Aglio suggests that the limited participation of the Cumans was a consequence of their involvement in hostilities and conflicts between Russian principalities, and after 1223 and the Battle of Kalka – of the Mongol threat that directly threatened the lands of Cumania.

their interference with the feuds and conflicts between the Russian principalities and, after the Battle of Kalka of 1223 – the Mongol invasion. The above-mentioned thesis seems logical, but some questions arise: Where there any other reasons for the deterioration of the alliance before the Mongolian impact? What if the reverse sequence is also possible, i.e. the reason for Boril's military failures had been in the collapse of the traditional alliance with the Cumans as a result of a changed *status quo* years before the Mongolian impact on Cumania? What factor could cause such a deep impact on Bulgarian-Cuman relations?

According to some Hungarian sources, at the beginning of the second decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Cumans, led by three chieftains, attacked Hungarian troops who crossed the Oltenia region on their way to the fortress of Vidin. The latter had been sent in help to Tsar Boril by King Andrew II of Hungary (1205–1235), while the Cumans acted in an attempt to stop any support for the Bulgarian tsar<sup>14</sup>. Leaving aside the disputes about the year, which varies from 1210 to 1213, the information about the broken relations and even clashes between Boril and the Cumans in the Lower Danube is definitely worth paying attention to. Even if we refer to the events in question to 1211 (or 1213), this testifies to a radical change in Bulgarian-Cuman relations, and the issue raises the need to analyze additional written sources. Let us focus our attention on the latest reliable information about Cuman allies in Boril's military campaigns.

After his enthronement in Tărnovo, Boril continued the military actions against the Latins. As early as the start of the 1208 campaign, there were numerous Cuman warriors in Tsar Boril's troops<sup>15</sup>. How many of these Cumans took part in the battle of Philippopolis on August 1, 1208, remains unclear. Quite possibly, most of them left the military campaign as early as the summer, as evidenced by the written sources about the campaigns of 1205, 1206, and 1207. However, the outcome of the battle of Philippopolis led to the conclusion that this cavalry was not as numerous as in Kaloyan's campaigns in 1205 and 1206.

The next statement about the Cumans' participation in the military campaigns of Tsar Boril refers to 1211 (according to some researchers to the previous 1210)<sup>16</sup>. In April 1211, a number of Cumans appeared in Southeastern Thrace<sup>17</sup>. According to Vassil Zlatarski, the rapid withdrawal of Tsar Boril, in the same month (of April 1211), had been a result of the rebellion in Vidin in Northwestern Bulgaria in the spring of that year, supported by some Cuman chieftains<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> V. SPINEI, *Moldavia in the 11<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Bucharest 1986, p. 97. The most important clue is that Spinei describes these Cumans in the Wallachian lowlands, which sounds logical.

<sup>15</sup> VALANSIEN, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> J. LONGNON, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin. Recherches sur les croisés de la quatrième croisade*, Genève 1978, p. 144.

<sup>17</sup> G. PRINZING, *Der Brief Kaiser Heinrichs von Konstantinopel vom 13. Januar 1212. Überlieferungsgeschichte, Neuedition und Kommentar*, B 43, 1973, p. 48–51.

<sup>18</sup> В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История...*, p. 304.

However, an obvious contradiction is evident. On the one hand, in the campaign of Tsar Boril against the Latins, Cuman troops participated, but on the other hand – the rebellion in Vidin was supported by the Cumans. This contradiction can be explained in two logical ways. The first one is that there were different Cuman chieftains and troops involved in the above-mentioned actions, and the second is that the rebellion in the fortress of Vidin preceded the military campaign and the march of 1211, or even could be dated to the previous 1210. Even with accepting the second possible explanation, we can assume that these were two groups of Cumans – loyal allies of the Bulgarian ruler, and Cuman chieftains acting against Boril.

Continuing with the chronology of the Cuman participation in the military campaign, we can point out that in the summer of 1211 in the Battle of Pelagonia plain, Tsar Boril and his ally – Sebastokrator Strez, suffered a defeat by the united Latin and Epirotes' forces. There is not a clear indication of the number of the Cumans, but we can assume it was relatively low. In the same year of 1211, Boril initiated a new campaign and marched towards Thessaloniki, but again the Cumans' role and the number of their troops remains uncertain. Two years later, Boril, in alliance with Strez, set off on a march against the Kingdom of Thessaloniki, but it remains unclear whether or not the Cumans participated in the campaign. Similar was the situation about the next campaign of the Bulgarian ruler in the same year of 1213 – against the Latins and their ally – Despot Alexios Slav. This failure in the above-mentioned campaigns, lead to the assumption that Boril no longer relied on mass Cuman support. Obviously, between 1211 and 1213 there was a significant drop in the scale of the Cuman support in comparison with the period 1186–1210. The subsequent events in the period 1213–1217 also remain unclear. Certainly, we know that Boril divorced the Cuman queen and married the niece of Latin Emperor Henry I, and a marriage had been also planned between the Hungarian heir Bela (IV) and Boril's daughter.

This marked a dramatic collapse in the relations with the former allies – the Cumans. In search of the reasons behind this, we could state the following. Some of the events in the period 1205–1213 suggest that the Cumans (or at least a part of their tribes and clans) were out of control. Last but not at least, the Cumans' paganism was also an obstacle to stable political relations between the Bulgarians and the Cumans. The fact that neither the Cumans nor the Vlachs were present in the struggle of the pretender John Assen for the throne in 1217–1218 is also indicative.

Next, a possible cause of the broken alliance may be the involvement of the Danubian Cumans in a military conflict with the Teutonic Order. Despite the significant archaeological data and the number of academic studies, the history of the Cumans in the lands of today's Moldavia and Northeastern Romania remains fragmented, controversial, and obscured by mysteries and speculations. The majority of the written sources present scarce information, mainly related to the Cumans'

way of life and warfare, as well as the names of some Cuman chieftains and dynasties. Despite the archaeological material, it is still too early to conclude, because the information relates not only to the Cumans but also to the Uzi, the Petchenegs, and the Mongols. However, modern archaeological excavations in the territory of present-day Romania and Moldova provide a reliable basis for a general picture of the nomadic presence in the period of the 10<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus, this allows for analyzing the nomadic presence in territories of Romania and Moldova<sup>19</sup>. The archaeological map of the nomadic presence in the areas between the Dniester, the Carpathians, and the Danube for three centuries leads to a conclusion that the Cumans in these lands hardly exceeded 100,000 people. This calls into question the written data on the number of Cuman armies in the Bulgarian-Latin wars of about 14,000 cavalries. From another point of view, this is about the potential of some of the Cumans or the most southwestern territories of vast Cumania, with the possibility that first Assenids – Peter, Assen, and Kaloyan, attracted Cuman allies and mercenaries from other, more eastern Cuman clans and tribes.

One of the typical Cuman characteristics in the territories of the Lower Danube relates to their periodic seasonal resettlement, provoked by their nomadic way of life. There is some evidence that the spring and autumn resettlements were usually carried out at distances of up to 200 kilometers. If we trust that, the winter camps and pastures of the Cumans of Northeastern Wallachia and Moldova, which have been explicitly documented by archaeological data, were probably located no more than 200–250 km from the summer pastures in the Southeastern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains. We should also keep in mind the fact that archaeological findings from the lands of present-day Moldova are much more numerous than in the Wallachian plain<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, the withdrawal of the Cumans from the military operations of the first Assenids in May (or June) was because of their seasonal resettlement, and movement of the herds towards fresh and green pastures. During this period, however,

<sup>19</sup> A. IONITA, *Structures...*, p. 127–128. The author analyzes 581 nomadic burials in 156 places from the period 10<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century. The majority of the burial sites and of the buried individuals are on the territory of Moldova, and a small one – on the territory of Wallachia. The author summarizes that burials with weapons constitute 12–13% (of the total number). If we connect this with the assumption that in their demographic and political heyday the Cumans in these territories numbered about or not much more than 100,000 people, then the armed men would number no more than 12,000–15,000 people.

<sup>20</sup> A very bright example of the seasonal movements of the Cumans can be found in *Nicetas Choniatae's* description of the siege of *Dimotikon* by the Bulgarian Tsar Kaloyan (the end of February – May 1206). According to the author, the Bulgarians were forced to end the siege after the Cuman allies' withdrawal in late May or early June 1206. Another illustrative example can be found in the description of the siege of Adrianople (the spring of 1207) when the Cumans left the siege *because of the summer heat*. Vivid evidence of the calendar of seasonal resettlement of the Cumans is also the description of the military campaign in 1208 when Tsar Boril restarted the war against the Latins supported by significant Cuman contingents in April.

alongside the pasturing, some of the men moved to the northwest, crossing the Carpathian passages and invading Southeastern Transylvania. This was also facilitated by the distance from the Carpathian summer camps and pastures to the Southeastern Transylvania – about 100 kilometers.

The above gives reason to assume that the political situation at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century provided excellent opportunities for the Cumans, who made the most of the alliance with the dynasty of the Assenids, to enrich themselves with booty, without interrupting their seasonal resettlement. In addition to the huge gains, this alliance provided Cumans with a safe border to the south-southwest, as the Cumans' clans between the River Dniester, the Carpathian Mountains, and the Lower Danube had powerful neighbors to the west and the north.

Most probably, a large part of the Cuman allies and Bulgarian hired mercenaries at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the first decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century arrived from the lands of present-day Moldova. However, we must assume that some of the Cuman allies reached as far as the western part of the Wallachian plane. We can presume that the rebellion of the Cuman chieftains in Vidin testifies in favor of such an assumption. What was the reason for the collapse in the relations of the former allies? These factors have been already presented, but one has been underestimated by Bulgarian medievalists – the Teutonic Order in Burzenland and its military activity in the period between 1212 and 1222.

Some Latin written sources provide valuable information on the impact of the Teutonic Order activity in southeastern Transylvania on the Cumans between the Carpathian Mountains, the Lower Danube, and the River Dniester. In particular, four charters of the Hungarian King Andrew II in favor of the Teutons in Burzenland shed light on the events under question. At the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Burzenland was inhabited mainly by German colonists, as the region was abandoned after a series of devastating Cuman raids. The first of the above mentioned king's charters – from 1211, 1212, and 1215, testifies to the placement of the Teutonic Order in Burzenland and the cause – the threat of Cuman attacks<sup>21</sup>. The course of action of the Teutons, set out in the Hungarian king's charter of 1211, is supported by letters from Pope Gregory IX, which cite frequent and devastating Cuman raids in the lands of Burzenland as the reason for the Teutonic settlement<sup>22</sup>. In this document, the Hungarian ruler defined the direction of the

<sup>21</sup> H. ZIMMERMANN, *Der Deutsche Orden...*, p. 80–89.

<sup>22</sup> There are two theses about the identity of the Cumans who were attacking Burzenland. According to the former, these were the Danube Cumans, who in the spring and early summer migrated with their flocks and families to the Carpathians, carrying out their attacks through seven passes. The latter thesis is based on indirect information about Cuman invasions during the winter months, suggesting these Cumans were closer to the lands of Burzenland. We can presume that the attacks were carried out through the *Buzau Pass* and other nearby passes, or more generally from areas between the present-day city of *Buzau* and the town of *Foscani* to the west-northwest. There is some evidence from the Hungarian charters and papal letters that refers to this region.

territorial expansion of the Teutons in the territories beyond the Carpathian Mountains, highlighting the danger of the Cumans to the land, called *Burzland*. The Order proved to be very effective both in defense of Burzenland and the colonists' settlement and in the subsequent expansion of the Teutonic brethren beyond the Carpathian range.

Furthermore, the charters, and the letters testify to the beginning of a Teutonic-Cuman conflict in 1211–1212. We can also assume that the Cumans between Dniester and Danube were heavily engaged, resulting in their limited involvement as allies and mercenaries in the military campaigns of Tsar Boril. Another charter of Andrew II of 1212, giving extra privileges to the Teutonic Order, can also be mentioned. According to the charter, the Teutons, who were recently positioned on the border, defeated the constant attacks of the Cumans, subjecting themselves to death to protect the kingdom<sup>23</sup>. Another diploma of the Hungarian ruler of 1215 testifies that the Teutons completely controlled Burzenland and the border territories as they entered the Cuman lands<sup>24</sup>.

Next, the documents in question testify to the increased activity of the Cumans in Transylvania at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Whether and how we can relate this to the Bulgarian-Hungarian conflicts in 1192–1193, 1195, and 1202–1204 remains unclear<sup>25</sup>. Surely the conflict with the Hungarians broke out again in 1208 and continued *de jure* to the Bulgarian-Hungarian agreement of 1213–1214. It is also logical to accept that some of the Cumans' actions aimed at Hungaria (Transylvania) were in support of the Bulgarians. Therefore, a direct connection between Bulgarian-Hungarian conflicts at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Cuman attacks on Burzenland, and the subsequent settlement of the Teutonic order in the region after 1211 could be supposed. The above indicates that the worsened situation for the Cumans north of the Lower Danube and west of the River Dniester after 1212, and especially between 1215–1222, had a significant impact on the Eastern Balkans<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> H. ZIMMERMANN, *Der Deutsche Orden...*, p. 164–165.

<sup>24</sup> The original of this deed from 1215 was lost, but restored according to a letter of Pope Gregory IX to Andrew II dated April 26, 1231. Zimmerman dated the charter to 1215 and Hautala agrees with him, but other historians date it to 1221 or even to 1222 (*Documente privind istoria României, Veacul XI, XII și XIII. C. Transilvania*, vol. I, 1075–1250, București 1951, p. 195, 378). I personally agree with the position of Zimmerman and Hautala.

<sup>25</sup> Хр. ДИМИТРОВ, *Българо-унгарски...*, p. 124.

<sup>26</sup> V. SPINEI, *The Romanians and the Turkic Nomads North of the Danube Delta from the Tenth to the Mid-thirteenth Century*, Leiden 2009 [= ECEEMA, 6], p. 417. According to Spinei, even if the Teutons did not fully control the lands between the Carpathians and the Danube after 1215–1216, they certainly commanded respect and strongly influenced the region. Another researcher who sees the connection between the settlement of the Teutons in Burzenland and the changes in the Bulgarian-Cuman relations is Șerban Papacostea. In his 1993 study, Papacostea outlined a direct link between the settlement of the Teutonic Order in Burzenland and the papal strategic plans to break up the military-political alliance between Bulgarians and Cumans (Ș. PAPACOSTEA, *Români în secolul al*



Most likely, one of the general reasons for Boril's instability on the Bulgarian throne in the last years of his rule was the lack of traditional Cuman support due to the events in the north. In this situation, assuming that the revolt in Vidin can be dated to 1211 and even later, in 1213, the connection with the actions of the Teutons in the lands of the Cumans between the Dniester and the Danube seems clear. We can presume that the revolt against Boril was supported by Cuman leaders, for whom the situation on the borders of Burzenland and the emerging Bulgarian-Hungarian rapprochement posed a direct threat.

However, the written sources' data after 1211 testify to the extremely deteriorated relations between the Bulgarian tsar and the Cumans. During that period we do not encounter written information about large-scale Cuman actions south of the Danube. Probably one of the main reasons for Boril's instability on the throne in the last years of his rule was the lack of strong Cuman support due to the events in the north. The reasons for this break-up remain unclear, but there are generally two possibilities. The first relates to the participation of Cuman leaders in the revolt against Boril, and the second is a direct reflection of the events on the Teutonic-Cuman border after 1211. Likely, the two reasons are closely related.

The last of the four Hungarian royal charters, dating from 1222, reveals important information about the Teutonic territorial expansion<sup>27</sup>. According to the text, the Hungarian king extended the rights of the Order over new territories in the lands of the Cumans in present-day Southern Moldova. This charter confirms the Teutonic possession of former Cuman territories east and southeast of the Carpathians and testifies that the Cumans were under strong Teutonic pressure. It is very probable that in practice, after 1215, there were no real possibilities for sending military aid to the Bulgarian ruler from clans and dynasties in today's Moldova. Most likely, due to the circumstances described above, the Cumans were neglected by the Bulgarian ruler, who sought rapprochement with Hungary and the Latin Empire.

---

XIII-lea între Cruciata și Imperiul Mongol, București 1993, p. 29). At the same time, Papacostea only notes that the placement of the order changed the geopolitical situation in the period 1212–1213, without examining in more detail the specific effects of this change on the Bulgarian-Cuman, Bulgarian-Hungarian and Bulgarian-Latin relations in the following years. The same position is supported by Alexandru Madgearu, who briefly touches on the connection between the placement of the Teutonic Order in Burzenland and the Bulgarian-Latin conflict, emphasizing the role of Pope Honorius III (1216–1227) in the policy of attracting Teutons to oppose a strong anti-Latin coalition (A. MADGEARU, *The Asanids. The Political and Military History of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185–1280)*, Leiden 2017 [= ECEEMA, 41], p. 186). Other authors also point to the role of the Teutonic factor in changing the *status quo* in the southeast of the Carpathians, but there is still no detailed analysis of the impact of these events and processes on the complex political and military picture of Bulgarian-Cuman, Bulgarian-Hungarian and Bulgarian-Latin relations in the second decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>27</sup> H. ZIMMERMANN, *Der Deutsche Orden...*, p. 169–172; P. HAUTALA, *Chapters of the Hungarian King Andrew II granted to the Teutonic Knights in Transylvania: Latin Texts, Translation into Russian, and Commentaries*, GHC 8, 2015, p. 23–24.

Further information on military success and the territorial expansion of the Teutons can be found in two papal letters, dated 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> December 1223, addressed to the Bishop of Transilvania and to the Archbishop of Esztergom. The Pope points out the successes of the Teutons and calls on the Bishop to assist in attracting settlers to support the military successes of the Teutonic brothers<sup>28</sup>. In 1225, Hungarian-Teutonic cooperation ended dramatically with the king's entry with troops and the expulsion of the brothers from Burzenland and the kingdom, but the consequences of the order's military presence were lasting.

To sum the above up, Bulgarian tsar Boril entered into a conflict with mighty Cuman chieftains and their clans who settled in the lands between the River Dniester, the Carpathian Mountain, and the Lower Danube few years before the treaty with Hungaria of 1213 (or 1214). Moreover, the relations with the Cumans deteriorated further after the rebellion in Vidin (most probably in 1210 or 1211)<sup>29</sup>. In the new situation of war between the Hungarian crown, backed by the Teutonic Order – from one side, and the Cumans – from the other, the Bulgarian-Hungarian agreement of 1213 probably excluded direct or indirect support for the former Cuman allies north of the Danube. Quite evidently, the peace and the Bulgarian-Hungarian-Latin alliance put an end to the traditional political and military support of the Cumans.

Probably, in the period 1208–1210, there started deep political conflict between Boril and some Cuman chieftains and their clans. However, the Bulgarian ruler still relied on some of his traditional allies from the lands of present-day Bessarabia, but this resource became increasingly limited and uncertain in the next few years as a result of the Teutonic-Cuman war. Faced with this problem, Tsar Boril undertook rapprochement with Hungary. In this context, the Cuman participation in the revolt against Boril can be considered as a logical and to some extent expected response to the Bulgarian-Hungarian union<sup>30</sup>. The motives behind Boril's political decision could be searched in two directions: on the one hand the involvement of the Cumans in a prolonged war against the Teutonic Order, and on the other – a growing Cuman's political and military influence in Bulgaria. Whatever the main reason and motivation for the 1213 political turnaround (started most

<sup>28</sup> H. ZIMMERMANN, *Der Deutsche Orden...*, p. 175–176, 177; P. HAUTALA, *The Teutonic Knights' Military Confrontation with the Cumans during their Stay in Transylvania (1211–1225)*, GHC 8, 2015, p. 85.

<sup>29</sup> I. VÁSÁRY, *Cumans and Tatars. Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185–1365*, Cambridge 2005, p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Хр. ДИМИТРОВ, *Българо-унгарски...*, p. 125. In this context, Hristo Dimitrov's thesis sounds convincing, as the latter believes that Hungarian aid to quell the revolt against Boril in the Vidin and Branichevo regions was not at the cost of the latter's surrender to the Bulgarian ruler. Quite the opposite. According to Dimitrov, Hungarian aid in 1213–1214 was an expression of allied relations and loyalty to Boril, and under Hungarian rule was actually not Branichevo, but the Belgrade region, taken from the Bulgarians at the beginning of Boril's rule – in 1208.

probably in 1210–1211), its consequences were long-lasting. The Cumans had never been so actively and decisively present in the military and political history of medieval Bulgaria.

We now turn to the other important ally of the first Assenids – the Vlachs. The Vlachs are quite present in the historical sources in the 11<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century. The image of the Vlachs in the chronicles of the Fourth Crusade is the subject of research in some works<sup>31</sup>, but the most important aspect in this paper is their role in the events under question. First, the sources give many examples that the Vlachs were an important factor in the military campaigns of the first Assenids at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the first decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. According to Nicetas Choniates, with the extraordinary tax collected at the vicinity of Anhialo and by the barbarians of Haemus, called Moesians and now Vlachs, the emperor actually provoked an uprising that avenged the seized cattle and other concerns of the population. Therefore, we can conclude that the Vlachs, known as breeders, were among the first and most fierce participants in the uprising and the consequent military actions of Peter, Assen and Kaloyan in the period 1185–1207<sup>32</sup>.

Also, the information that the local ruler Dobromir Hryz did not initially take part in the uprising, but supported the emperor with 500 of his countrymen can be interpreted as information that the Vlachs, or some of them, were a militarized population serving the Empire<sup>33</sup>. There is some evidence that such groups of the paramilitary population certainly enjoyed some privileges and tax reliefs. It could be the point which can explain the mass participation in the uprising by Vlachs whose traditional privileges and tax reliefs had been revoked, and their support for the uprising and for the cause of the established Bulgarian Tsardom as the effective return of these privileges and tax reliefs by the first Assenids.

Based on two of the best-informed authors describing the events in question – Nicetas Choniates and Joffroi de Villardouin, we can note that both use ethnonyms such as Bulgarians, Vlachs, Cumans, sometimes Scythians and Moesians. However, at the very beginning of the uprising and in the next two decades, the role of the Vlachs as part of the Assenids' army is beyond doubt. In both Choniates

---

<sup>31</sup> F. CURTA, *Imaginea vlahilor la cronicarii Cruciadei a IV-a. Până unde răzbate ecoul discuțiilor intelectuale de la Constantinopol? The Image of the Vlachs from the Chronicles of the Fourth Crusade. How Far does the Echo of Constantinopolitan Intellectual Debates Reach?*, *ArHM* 1, 2015, p. 35. Curta draws attention to the chronicles of the Fourth Crusade where the Roman origin of the Vlachs, the legend of Troy, and the escape of the Trojans are presented in the text. According to Florin Curta, the image of the Vlachs in Nicetas Choniates' work and other Byzantine sources – on the one hand, and in the Latin chronicles of the Fourth Crusade on the other – is very different and politically determined. The author himself is not sure what the identity of the Vlachs was at that time, but according to him, the image of the Vlachs served other ideological purposes. Presumably, it was an attempt at reliable explanations for the decline of the Byzantine Empire during the Angeloy dynasty, or an attempt to build relations with the Bulgarian renewed Tsardom after the battle of Adrianople in 1205.

<sup>32</sup> NICETAS CHONIATES, p. 26.

<sup>33</sup> NICETAS CHONIATES, p. 54.

and Villardouen, the ethnonym Bulgarians appears more and more often in the course of the events, and something interesting can be observed in the latter sources. According to Joffroi de Villardouen, the army of Ioannis (Tsar Kaloyan) in the military operations in the south and southeast, in Thrace, included Vlachs and Cumans, and sometimes Bulgarians, Vlachs and Cumans<sup>34</sup>.

Next, while the Vlachs are present in the actions in Thrace<sup>35</sup>, the sources described mainly Bulgarians and Cumans in the actions in the southwest – to the lands of the Thessalonian ruler Boniface<sup>36</sup>. This observation leads to the assumption that the described Vlachs came mostly from the north central and north eastern part of the Haemus Mountains and were therefore involved the most in actions closer to the south of the Haemus – in the lands of Thrace. We do not know exactly how the Vlachs fought, but they certainly rode horses<sup>37</sup>. However, Vlachs disappeared from the written sources describing the rule and the military actions of the next rulers as Boril (the later period of Boril's rule) and Joan II Asen in the period 1207–1241. It is logical to assume that it was a sequence of disturbing relations, just like the above discussed Bulgarian-Cuman relationship breakdown after 1211.

Unfortunately, the sources do not provide clear information either about the real and practical reasons for the close alliance during the uprising in 1185–1186 and the next two decades, nor a possible rupture of the relations after the death of Tsar Kaloyan. It can be underlined that this is in clear contradiction with the theses about the Vlach origin of Assenids, since the tsars after Kaloyan were from the same dynasty, i.e. if the Bulgarian-Vlach alliance was due to Vallachian origin of Assenids, the lack of massive Vlach support after the first decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> is in clear contradiction with the previous statement.

Rather, I would suggest the following thesis here. The mass participation of Vlachs in the events of the late 12<sup>th</sup> and the early 13<sup>th</sup> century is clear evidence of a mass Vlach presence in today's northern Bulgaria, of strong anti-Byzantine sentiments, and excellent relations with the first three Assenids. On the other hand, the rare mention and the disappearance of the Vlachs from the sources as Bulgarian allies after the rule of Boril cannot be accepted as a result of sudden demographic changes and mass Vlachs' resettlement. It did happen, but later, when the 14<sup>th</sup> century demographic and political situation testifies to the concentration of the Vlach population in the lands north of the Danube. What happened in the period of 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries?

Most likely, the political changes in the Bulgarian Tsardom, the decline of Cuman power in the lands between the Danube, the Carpathians, and the Dniester, and the new political *status quo* after the Mongol invasion, created favorable conditions for Vlachs' resettlement to the north. In the context of the above, the

<sup>34</sup> VILARDUEN, p. 91, 105, 112.

<sup>35</sup> VILARDUEN, p. 116.

<sup>36</sup> VILARDUEN, p. 133.

<sup>37</sup> VILARDUEN, p. 115.

10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century's pieces of evidence of conflicts between Vlachs and local Byzantine authorities can be regarded as a reaction against stronger control and higher taxation over this pastoral population. It certainly may explain the reaction of the Vlachs and the mass support for Assenids in the revolt and the initial construction of the restored Bulgarian Tsardom. But the inevitable imposition of the feudal system and the increase of the taxes in the Second Bulgarian Tsardom in the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century could be among the main reasons for the withdrawal of support for the new dynasty, and the subsequent migration of Vlachs to the lands north of the Danube River.

In conclusion, the above presented historical processes and events in the Balkans in the late 12<sup>th</sup> – first decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century can be analyzed through a comprehensive approach, and with taking into account many political and military factors in a much wider region. In this context, the changes in the Bulgarian-Cuman and Bulgarian-Vlach relations can be considered by placing them in wider context and by analyzing the role of factors such as the Teutonic Order, the dynamics of creation and deconstruction of political and military alliances, and last but not least – the evolution of the feudal system in the period under review.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

ANRI DJO VALANSIEN, *Istoriya na imperator Anri*, Sofija 2009.

*Documente privind istoria României, Veacul XI, XII și XIII.C. Transilvania*, vol. I, 1075–1250, București 1951.

*Georgii Acropolitae Historia*, Sofija 1972 [= *Fontes graeci historiae bulgaricae*, 8], p. 151–213.

*Innocentius III papa – Caloiohannes rex. Latinski izvori za bălgarskata istorija*, vol. III, Sofija 1965.

*Litterae Henrici Constantinopolitani imperatoris ad dominum papam de debellatione Voullae apud Philipopolim*, [in:] *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina*, ed. J.-P. MIGNE, vol. CCXV, Paris 1855, col. 1522–1523.

*Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, Sofija 1983 [= *Fontes graeci historiae bulgaricae*, 11], p. 8–94.

ROBERT DE CLARI, *La conquête de Constantinople*, Paris 1974.

*Theodori Scutariotae Compendium chronicum*, Sofija 1972 [= *Fontes graeci historiae bulgaricae*, 8], p. 214–304.

ŽOFROA DJO VILARDUEN, *Zavladjavaneto na Konstantinopol*, Sofija 1985.

### Secondary Literature

CURTA F., *Imaginea vlahilor la cronicarii Cruciadei a IV–a. Până unde răzbate ecoul discuțiilor intelectuale de la Constantinopol? The Image of the Vlachs from the Chroniclers of the Fourth Crusade. How Far does the Echo of Constantinopolitan Intellectual Debates Reach?*, "Arheologia Moldovei" 1, 2015, p. 25–68.

- DALL'AGLIO F., *The Interaction between Nomadic and Sedentary Peoples on the Lower Danube: the Cumans and the "Second Bulgarian Empire"*, [in:] *The Steppe Lands and the World beyond them. Studies in Honor of Victor Spinei on his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, Iași 2013, p. 299–315.
- DALL'AGLIO F., *The Military Alliance between the Cumans and Bulgaria from the Establishment of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom to the Mongol Invasion*, "Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi" 16, 2008–2009, p. 29–54.
- DANCHEVA-VASILEVA A., *Bălgarija i Latinskata imperija (1204–1261)*, Sofija 1985.
- DIMITROV Hr., *Bălgaro-ungarski otnošenija prez Srednovkovieto*, Sofija 1998.
- HAUTALA P., *Chapters of the Hungarian King Andrew II granted to the Teutonic Knights in Transylvania: Latin Texts, Translation into Russian, and Commentaries*, "Golden Horde Civilization" 8, 2015, p. 13–31.
- HAUTALA P., *Papskie poslanija v Vengriju, kasajuščiesja perebyvanija tevtonskich rycarej v Transilvanii (1211–1225)*, "Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana" 1, 2015, p. 96–114.
- HAUTALA P., *The Teutonic Knights' Military Confrontation with the Cumans during their Stay in Transylvania (1211–1225)*, "Golden Horde Civilization" 8, 2015, p. 80–90.
- ILIEV N., *Otnosno vremeto na potušavaneto na bunta sreštu car Boril vāv Vidin*, [in:] *Izvestija na muzeite v Severozapadna Bălgarija*, vol. IX, Sofija 1984, p. 85–94.
- IONITA A., *Structures de pouvoir et populations au Nord du Danube aux X<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles reflétées par les découvertes funéraires*, "Transylvanian Review" 19.5, 2010, p. 115–134.
- IVANOV I., *Svoi i čuždi: obrazāt na ungarči, huni, bălgari, gārtsi, kumani, tatari, sārbi i vlasi v „Chronica Picta” ot XIV v.*, [in:] *Studia Balcanica*, vol. XXXII, Sofija 2017, p. 153–164.
- KNJAZJKIJ I.O., *Polovtsy v Dnestrovsko-Karpatских zemljach i Nižnem Podunav'e v konce XII-pervych desjatiletjach XIII v. Social'no-ekonomičeskaja i političeskaja istorija Moldavii perioda feodalizma*, Kišinev 1988, p. 22–32.
- LONGNON J., *Les compagnons de Villehardouin. Recherches sur les croisés de la quatrième croisade*, Genève 1978.
- MADGEARU A., *The Asanids. The Political and Military History of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185–1280)*, Leiden 2017 [= East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, 41], <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004333192>
- NIKOLOV A., *Cumani Bellatores in the Second Bulgarian State (1185–1396)*, [in:] *Annual of the Medieval Studies Department*, vol. XI, Budapest 2005, p. 223–229.
- РАРАСОСТЕА Ş., *Românii în secolul al XIII-lea între Cruciată și Imperiul Mongol*, București 1993.
- РАВЛОВ Pl., *Srednovkovna Bălgarija i Kumanite. Voennopolitičeski otnošenija (1186–1241)*, "Трудове на Великотърновския Университет 'Св. св. Кирил и Методий'" / "Trudove na Velikotarnovskiya Universitet 'Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodij'" 27, 1989, p. 9–59.
- PRINZING G., *Der Brief Kaiser Heinrichs von Konstantinopel vom 13. Januar 1212. Überlieferungsgeschichte, Neyedition und Kommentar*, "Byzantion" 43, 1973, p. 48–51.
- RASOVSKIJ D., *Rolj polovcev v vojnah Asenej s Vizantijskoj i Latinskoj imperijami (1186–1207 gg.)*, "Списание на Българската академия на науките" / "Spisanie na Bălgarskata akademija na naukite" 58, 1939, p. 203–211.
- SPINEI V., *Moldavia in the 11<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Bucharest 1986.
- SPINEI V., *The Romanians and the Turkic Nomads North of the Danube Delta from the Tenth to the Mid-thirteenth Century*, Leiden 2009 [= East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, 6], <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004175365.i-482>

STOYANOV V., *Kumans in Bulgarian History (Eleventh–Fourteenth Centuries)*, [in:] *The Turks*, vol. I, *Early Ages*, part 9, *Turks in East Europe*, Ankara 2002, p. 680–689.

TSANKOVA-PETKOVA G., *Bălgarija pri Asenevci*, Sofija 1978.

VÁSÁRY I., *Cumans and Tatars. Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185–1365*, Cambridge 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511496622>

ZIMMERMANN H., *Der Deutsche Orden im Burzenland. Eine diplomatische Untersuchung*, Köln 2000.

ZLATARSKI V., *Istorija na bălgarskata dăržava preză sr(ě)dnită v(ě)kove*, vol. III, *Vtoro bălgarsko carstvo. Bălgarija pri As(ě)nevtsi (1187–1280)*, Sofija 1972.

**Ivelin Ivanov**

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University  
Faculty of History  
Teodosij Tarnovski Str. 2  
5003 Veliko Tărnovo, Bulgaria  
ivoar@abv.bg



© by the author, licensee University of Lodz – Lodz University Press, Lodz, Poland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

---